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Chair: Ms. Miculescu ..... (Romania)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Statement by the President of the General Assembly

1. **Mr. Al-Nasser** (Qatar), President of the General Assembly, said that, among the items on its agenda, the Fourth Committee's deliberations on peacekeeping operations in all their aspects related to the core mission of the United Nations. The promotion of peace, security and prosperity worldwide was connected with the sustainable development and prosperity that he had announced at the start of the sixty-sixth session as one of four priority areas. Also, the Committee's deliberations on the peaceful uses of outer space had given impetus to international cooperation in that field.

2. The situation in the Middle East was one of the most sensitive issues the Committee considered, especially in view of recent events. In a historic development, the President of the Palestinian Authority had on 23 September submitted Palestine's application for membership in the United Nations; at the same time, the Quartet was accelerating its efforts to relaunch the negotiations which it was hoped would hasten the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine; and on 18 October, the international community had hailed an exchange of prisoners, proof of the vital importance of mediation in the peaceful settlement of disputes. Such developments should reinvigorate the Committee's work, and facilitate its adoption of the relevant resolutions so important to the overall process. The General Assembly must continue working towards the negotiation of a just and comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East, resulting in two viable, sovereign and independent States, living side by side in peace and security within recognized borders based on pre-1967 lines.

3. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), whose work the Committee also considered, had for over 60 years played a pivotal role in preserving regional stability by alleviating the suffering of the growing Palestine refugee population living under extreme political and economic conditions. Expressing his gratitude to those donors who had maintained their valuable voluntary contributions to the Agency even in difficult times, he urged Member States to do their part.

Agenda item 53: Report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories (A/66/356, A/66/362, A/66/364, A/66/370, A/66/373 and A/66/400)

4. **Mr. Kohona** (Sri Lanka), speaking as Chair of the Special Committee and introducing its report (A/66/370) describing living conditions and the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the occupied Syrian Golan between September 2010 and August 2011, said that it was based on information gathered during the Special Committee's one-week mission to the region in July 2011, including its first ever visit to the occupied Gaza Strip, along with meetings in Jordan. The Government of Israel had again failed to accommodate the Committee's request to visit the occupied West Bank and the Golan. Support had been made available for Palestinian, Israeli and Syrian witnesses, including non-governmental organizations, to appear before the Committee.

5. The Special Committee's overarching observation following its visit to Gaza was that, despite the limited relaxation of Israel's blockade, it continued to amount to collective punishment of the civilian population, with a particular impact on children and on physical and mental health. Also of serious concern were the Israeli restrictions on freedom of movement, sometimes even enforced by deadly gunfire, and on the importing of materials needed to reconstruct the housing and infrastructure still so visibly devastated by its shelling. Witnesses had also noted that Israel's "buffer zone" had effectively expropriated land within Gaza formerly used for agriculture and fishing, hobbling those industries and creating serious poverty.

6. In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Israel continued to confiscate Palestinian land, demolish houses and expand settlements, while settlers attacked Palestinians and their property, allegedly with the complicity of the Israeli security forces. Israel persisted with the construction of the separation wall, in defiance of international law. While the Special Committee welcomed the recent exchange of prisoners, it had heard testimony raising serious concerns about the treatment of Palestinians in Israeli prisons and their access to due process.

7. The Committee had been unable to travel to the Syrian Arab Republic in 2011, but had been in contact with victims in the occupied Syrian Golan by

teleconference. Their testimony indicated that Israel's policies and practices were unchanged. The specific concerns included discriminatory access to water, travel restrictions, the construction of a wall cordoning off the Territory, excessive use of force and poor conditions of detention.

8. The Special Committee's key recommendations were, with respect to Gaza, that Israel should lift the blockade, take immediate action to improve the health of children and clarify restrictions on internal freedom of movement. With respect to the West Bank, Israel should desist from confiscating further land or demolishing homes, and from expanding its settlements in occupied Palestinian land. At the same time, it should dismantle existing settlements, take effective measures to end violence by settlers against Palestinians and their property and ensure the humane treatment of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. With regard to the occupied Syrian Golan, Israel should ensure adequate access to water and facilitate visits for Syrians in the occupied Golan with family members elsewhere in Syrian territory.

9. **Mr. Šimonović** (Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights), introducing the five reports by the Secretary-General under agenda item 53, said that his report on the work of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories (A/66/373) outlined the activities undertaken by the Special Committee from September 2010 to August 2011 and by the Department of Public Information in support of the Special Committee's work.

10. The report on the applicability of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the other occupied Arab territories (A/66/362) indicated that, despite the Secretary-General's requests, no reply had been received from Israel or any of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention regarding action they had taken to implement General Assembly resolution 65/103.

11. The report on Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the occupied Syrian Golan (A/66/364), based on information provided by United Nations bodies operating in the territory and by Israeli and Palestinian non-governmental organizations, recommended, inter alia, that Israel should comply with its international legal obligations and its Road Map commitments in respect of settlements and that all serious allegations concerning settlement-related criminal acts should be properly investigated and prosecuted.

12. The report on Israeli practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem (A/66/356), focused mainly on violations of the right to life, demolitions, the shelling of Israeli civilian areas, and detention of Palestinians. Among other things, it called for observance of the international humanitarian principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution in the conduct of hostilities in order to avoid civilian casualties, and for accountability.

13. The report on the occupied Syrian Golan (A/66/400) summarized the Syrian Arab Republic's response to the Secretary-General's request for information from Member States on action taken to implement General Assembly resolution 65/106.

14. **Mr. Assaraf** (Israel) said that 19 rockets had been fired from Gaza into Israel during the Special Committee's visit. As its members must have noticed the rockets, he asked the Chair of the Special Committee why had they not been mentioned in its report.

15. **Mr. Kohona** (Sri Lanka) said that none of the Committee members who had visited Gaza could recall a single rocket being fired during their four-day visit, even though they had spent much time outdoors, having been advised that there was no risk. He agreed that it was difficult not to notice rockets being fired.

16. **Ms. Rasheed** (Observer for Palestine) said that, with the support of the international community, millions had taken to the streets in Middle Eastern countries to demand freedom, social and economic opportunities, democracy and human rights. Whereas in some instances the international community had acted to ensure the safety and rights of the civilian populations, it had yet to take decisive action to end the ruthless Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands and heed the appeals of Palestinian civilians for much-needed protection.

17. Israel's obligations as an occupying Power, which it had disregarded for four decades, were set forth in

the Fourth Geneva Convention, to which it was a party. The International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child also applied to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. Yet Israel had continued to make a mockery of international law by systematically violating the human rights of the Palestinian people, committing countless acts that constituted war crimes and State terrorism. It has caused unnecessary loss of life — almost 100 had been killed by Israeli occupying forces in the last year alone.

18. More than 750 Palestinians in the West Bank had been displaced following the demolition of their homes. Amid serious diplomatic efforts by all parties — and despite Israel's misleading assertions of its commitment to the two-State solution — its Government had recently announced the construction of nearly 6,000 more illegal settlement units in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and it had vowed to continue building new settlements in East Jerusalem, in specific retaliation for the acceptance of Palestine as a Member State of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Furthermore, there had been a sharp increase in Government-sanctioned acts of violence and harassment perpetrated by settlers against Palestinians throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory. It must be underscored that all settlement activity was illegal under international customary and criminal law, and that it posed the single greatest threat to the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian State and the two-State solution and, by extension, to a just and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians. The international community, including the Security Council, must bring Israel into compliance with its obligations.

19. At the same time, construction of Israel's expansionist wall continued. In and around East Jerusalem, moreover, Israel continued to expel indigenous Palestinians in order to create a Jewish majority in the city, with a view to determining its fate illegally and unilaterally. Israel's actions and words made it clear that it was not committed to peace. The Palestinian leadership, while it welcomed the recent agreement on the release of prisoners, continued, in addition, to call for the release of the remaining Palestinian political prisoners, totaling more than 5,000, including hundreds of children who where being detained under harsh conditions in Israeli prisons. Many were subjected to physical and mental abuse as well, held in solitary confinement and even tortured. The mistreatment of children, in particular, warranted immediate attention by the international community.

20. Turning to the Gaza Strip, she said that Israeli military attacks had continued against its more than 1.5 million besieged inhabitants, who were being collectively punished; at least 11 Palestinians had been killed in the preceding week alone in illegal extrajudicial executions. The poverty and deprivation was compounded by Israel's unlawful blockade, which was in its fifth year. The international community must demand that Israel fully lift the blockade and allow free movement of persons and goods, reconstruction and social rehabilitation.

21. The rule of law must apply to all members of the international community without exception, and the same moral and legal yardstick must be used to measure Israel's occupation and violations as applied to all other issues on the global agenda.

22. The Palestinian people and their leaders were committed to peace and the two-State solution, but the opportunity for peace was slipping away. All efforts must be exerted to bring about a final peace settlement in order to allow the Palestinian people to realize their right to self-determination and freedom in an independent State of Palestine, on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, at the same time ensuring a just resolution of the plight of the Palestine refugees.

23. **Mr. Abdelaziz** (Egypt), speaking on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, said that Israel's respect for international law was the prerequisite for ending human rights abuses in the occupied territories, and ending the occupation itself and the Arab-Israeli conflict. While noting recent international and regional efforts, the Movement regretted the failure to restart direct peace negotiations on the Palestinian track, mainly owing to Israel's lack of commitment to abide by clear agreed parameters. Those included Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1850 (2008), the Madrid terms of reference, including the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map. Israel's illegal acts of aggression as occupying Power were destabilizing the situation, and undermined the viability of the two-State solution on the basis of the 4 June 1967 borders.

24. As reflected in the Special Committee's report, the human rights situation in all the occupied territories was dire under the long-standing Israeli occupation. The Movement was deeply disturbed by the Committee's findings of systematic lawlessness, in particular with regard to the situation of children in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, where the overall situation continued to deteriorate, with a wide range of basic rights being violated. The Movement called, in particular, for the immediate cessation of Israeli measures aimed at illegally displacing or transferring Palestinian civilians from strategic areas in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, especially East Jerusalem. It was disturbing that Israel, the occupying Power, continued to pursue such practices — the settlement campaign, the separation wall, forced evictions, home demolitions, the revocation of residency rights — although they were prohibited under international law and had been rejected by the international community. Israeli settlements were undoubtedly the main obstacle to direct negotiations and the two-State solution. Steps must be taken in accordance with international law to end Israel's illegal measures, which affected especially the most vulnerable, such as women, children and refugees.

25. The critical human rights situation in Gaza, a top priority for the Movement, inflicted deep suffering on Palestinian civilians. Israel was imposing collective punishment through its ongoing blockade while the lasting consequences of its military aggression in 2008 and 2009 continued to violate human rights and international humanitarian law. Israel must fully lift the illegal blockade and open all crossing points. Welcoming the prisoner exchange agreed to under Egyptian auspices, the Movement nevertheless condemned the continued detention of more than 5,000 Palestinians in Israeli jails, regularly subjected to ill-treatment and abuse. They must be released immediately and, failing that, there must be a proper international inspection of their conditions.

26. In the occupied Syrian Golan, Israel was also clearly violating international law, and must withdraw completely in accordance with Security Council resolution 497 (1981) to 4 June 1967 borders.

27. It needed to be emphasized that serious peace negotiations could not be conducted while Israel violated the human rights of the civilian populations under occupation and exacerbated the conflict. The Non-Aligned Movement demanded that it cease all violations and act in good faith to promote an environment conducive to peace, by refraining from provocation, acting to alter the status especially of East Jerusalem, or prejudging the outcome of final-status negotiations. The international community must prevent the peace process from collapsing after so many years of efforts and itself demand that Israel respect its legal obligations as an occupying Power and cease all its violations of international law. Reaffirming the Non-Aligned Movement's unwavering commitment to a just and comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, with the question of Palestine at its core, he called for the immediate restoration of the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to exercise self-determination and sovereignty in an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

28. **Mr. Vrailas** (Observer for the European Union), speaking also on behalf of the candidate countries Croatia, Iceland, Montenegro and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; the stabilization and association process countries Albania and Serbia; and, in addition, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, said that the fundamental changes recently witnessed in the Arab world had made the need for progress in the Middle East peace process all the more urgent. Moreover, they had shown that the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinians for statehood and of Israelis for security must be heeded. The European Union reiterated its appeal to the parties to resume negotiations in accordance with the Quartet Statement of 23 September 2011 and underlined the Quartet's crucial role in facilitating the resumption of direct talks between Israel and the Palestinians.

29. Echoing the Quartet's call on both sides to refrain from provocation, the European Union deplored the recent Israeli decisions to expand East Jerusalem settlements and accelerate construction in East Jerusalem and the West Bank and in West Bank outposts. All settlement activity — an illegal obstacle to peace and the two-State solution — should cease immediately and new construction plans should be abandoned.

30. The European Union welcomed measures taken to ease restrictions on the freedom of movement in the West Bank and entry of goods into Gaza. Further steps should be taken, in order to push back radical elements and promote Palestinian economic development. Israel and all other parties must respect the human rights of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. Welcoming

the presentation of the Palestinian 2011-2013 National Development Plan on governance, economy, social development and infrastructure, he called for continued international support for the Palestinian state-building process. In view of troubling reports that the Israeli Government planned to suspend the transfer of revenues to the Palestinian Authority, he recalled that revenue collection by Israel on its behalf should be efficient, transparent and predictable.

31. With regard to Gaza, the European Union called for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), respect for international humanitarian law and the immediate and unconditional opening of crossings to allow the flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons. A solution must be found that allowed for the reconstruction and economic recovery of Gaza while addressing Israel's legitimate security concerns; the European Union had offered its assistance to achieve that objective. Concerned at the renewed exchange of fire in Gaza and the south of Israel, following the firing of rockets by Islamic Jihad into Israel, the European Union condemned the indiscriminate targeting of civilians and called on all sides to respect the ceasefire.

32. The European Union would continue to work with its partners within the Quartet and with others for a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

33. **Mr. Diallo** (Senegal) said that, out of respect for international moral principles and the Charter of the United Nations, his delegation expressed its solidarity with the suffering people of the occupied territories, who for more than four decades had been denied a normal life. Compassion was no longer enough for the Palestinian people and other Arabs living under the inglorious Israeli occupation, nor could they understand the international community's continued inability to prevent violations of their essential and inalienable rights.

34. In view of the continued occupation of the Arab territories, notwithstanding United Nations resolutions calling for its termination, the Security Council must reaffirm the need for strict compliance with all relevant resolutions and the Fourth Geneva Convention, and it must demand that Israel end its witting or unwitting violation of the human rights of populations under its occupation.

35. In its report, the Special Committee had collected sufficient evidence, despite Israel's failure to cooperate, of systematic violation of the rights to life, liberty and security and freedom of movement. Denial of those rights and of the Palestinian people's right to create an independent State with internationally recognized borders compromised the quest for a just and lasting peace.

36. **Mr. Haniff** (Malaysia), speaking as a member of the Special Committee, commended the Governments of Jordan and Egypt for their cooperation, in particular the latter for facilitating the Special Committee's first visit to Gaza, but regretted that Israel's uncooperative attitude had precluded a visit to the West Bank.

37. The Special Committee's report illustrated Israel's flagrant violations of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and other Arabs in the occupied territories. During the Committee's distressing mission to Gaza, he had personally observed that the Israeli blockade was a form of illegal collective punishment. Houses and other buildings lay in ruins for lack of construction materials, while inadequate power supply was affecting the whole society, but the elderly and sick in particular. The sea blockade had impoverished the fishermen of Gaza, while the encroachment of the "buffer zone" into Palestinian land had severely restricted farmers' activities. The enforcement of the blockade at gun point had led to many civilian casualties. Children in Gaza were crammed into containers that served as temporary schools. About 70 per cent of the 1.6 million Palestinians living in Gaza were totally dependent on the United Nations for humanitarian assistance. The Special Committee's recommendations on Gaza must be fully implemented. In particular, Israel must lift the blockade of Gaza, stop all settlement-related activities on Palestinian land, end its illegal and repressive policies and practices against Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem, ensure the right of the Palestinian children to education and adhere to international standards with regard to the treatment of Palestinian prisoners.

38. The human rights situation in the occupied Syrian Golan remained a matter of international concern, as a result of deplorable Israeli policies and practices such as discriminatory access to scarce resources, the impeding of cross-border family visits, annexation of Syrian lands, and mine-laying. Israel must, moreover, conduct a full and transparent investigation into the many deaths and injuries of unarmed Syrian civilians in May and June 2011. The dehumanization of Palestinians and other Arabs in the occupied territories

prevented the achievement of a just and lasting peace. The international community must stop allowing Israel to violate human rights and humanitarian law with impunity in the occupied Syrian Golan as well as the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

39. **Mr. Assaraf** (Israel) said that, with their glaring omissions, findings presented out of context and blatant distortions, the reports before the Committee undermined its credibility. The Special Committee's one-sided mandate ruled out any accurate or impartial reflection of the situation on the ground. Israel was harshly criticized at length, but Hamas's brutal repression of Palestinians in Gaza was overlooked, the thousands of Israelis killed, injured or bereaved by acts of Palestinian terror were ignored and incitement in Palestinian schools, mosques and media went unreported. The Special Committee had filled many pages of its report with fierce criticism of Israel, but the firing of 19 rockets at Israeli civilians during its mission to Gaza in July had been conveniently excluded — and just denied once more — as had the more than 9,000 rockets launched into southern Israel over the previous decade.

40. Like all countries, Israel had the right to protect its citizens. In just the past week, more than 40 rockets, long-range missiles and mortars had been launched into Israel, resulting in one death and many injuries. The acts of terror committed against Israelis in 2011 should shock all decent people. When Hamas was not attacking Israeli civilians, it was oppressing and violating the rights of its own people, deliberately endangering civilians and international organizations and inciting hatred against Jews and Israelis. In the West Bank, as well, terror attacks continued and Jews were murdered. No government should be expected to sit idly by under such circumstances and Israel would continue to exercise its right of self-defence, as appropriate.

41. The reports under consideration ignored the positive developments in the West Bank and Gaza, which had won international acknowledgement. According to Palestinian statistics, the gross domestic product (GDP) of Gaza had grown by 28 per cent in the first half of 2011, per capita income had risen by over 20 per cent, and unemployment had fallen dramatically. In the West Bank, Israel had removed hundreds of roadblocks and checkpoints, helping to achieve 8 per cent growth in 2010 and 4 per cent in the first half of 2011.

42. The Special Committee continued to suggest that settlements were the main cause of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, even though the conflict predated the first West Bank settlement by almost half a century. The issue of settlements would be addressed in negotiations, but the main obstacle to peace was not settlements but the Arab world's refusal to acknowledge the Jewish people's ancient connection with the land of Israel, and the Palestinian insistence on the so-called right of return. The Palestinian leadership was calling for an independent State, while insisting that its people return to the Jewish State. That proposition would mean the destruction of the State of Israel, and was thus a denial of its right to exist.

43. Israel was the only country in the region with a free and open judiciary, a bedrock commitment to advancing human rights, a vibrant democracy, a free press and a very active civil society; whereas in some of the States that were members of the Special Committee free expression was repressed, minorities were persecuted, elections were a sham, and fair trials had never taken place. For 43 years, the United Nations had invested resources in biased reports against the only free society in the Middle East, even as the people of Iran and the Arab world suffered repression, economic stagnation and tyranny. Because the unprofessional Special Committee distorted the truth blatantly, doing nothing to advance peace or address the real challenges facing the Palestinian people, Israel would continue to refuse to cooperate with it.

44. **Ms. Vivas Mendoza** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) read out an abridged version of a statement by her President, issued as document A/66/395-S/2011/611, in which he confirmed his country's support for a Palestinian State. Citing the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, Spanish writer Juan Goytisolo and Palestinian-American thinker Edward Said, the statement described the injustices suffered by the Palestinian people, adding that the Middle East conflict could not be resolved unless they obtained justice. Yet the same people who had suffered one of the worst genocides in history had become the executioners of the Palestinian people. Zionists used anti-Semitism to blackmail their opponents, but anyone who denounced the Western scourge of anti-Semitism must also condemn the barbaric apartheid regime imposed on the Palestinian people, whose very right to exist was denied.

45. Reviewing the history of the Zionist movement and the partition of Palestine, he said that the Zionist State had pursued its criminal strategy against the Palestinians with the unconditional support of the United States of America. Contrary to what Israel and its ally would have the world believe, the Middle East conflict was a modern political conflict originating in Europe. Priority was always given to Israel's security, while Palestine's was ignored, as corroborated by Israel's latest act of genocide in Gaza. Moreover, the security of Palestine could not be reduced to recognition of limited self-government in West Bank and Gaza enclaves. A free, sovereign and independent Palestinian State must be created with pre-1967 borders and East Jerusalem as its capital, while those in the Palestinian diaspora must be allowed back to their homeland. It was incredible that Israel, which existed thanks to a General Assembly resolution, had shown so much disdain for subsequent United Nations resolutions.

46. **Mr. Saripudin** (Indonesia) said it was regrettable that each year the Special Committee had to collect information about the occupied territories in extremely difficult circumstances, because Israel continued to ignore its legitimate request for access. Moreover, Israel had ignored General Assembly resolution 65/104 and pursued its illegal expansion of West Bank and East Jerusalem settlements, while demolishing Palestinian property, confiscating land and altering the demographic composition of the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Indeed, only days earlier, the Israeli Government had confirmed that the building of new settlement housing would be accelerated. At the same time, it was encouraging Israelis to settle in the occupied Syrian Golan. His delegation condemned Israel's systematic violation of human rights and international humanitarian law, a direct affront to the international community.

47. In view of Israel's disregard for basic Palestinian rights, he expressed strong support for the Special Committee's recommendations. Among other things, Israel must honour its international commitments and comply with international demands. It must end its discriminatory policies and practices and prevent attacks by Israeli settlers against Palestinian civilians and their property in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, while properly investigating criminal acts committed by settlers or the Israeli Defense Forces; and, in general, guaranteeing the equality of all before the law. The blockade of Gaza must end, as must the restrictions on movement that resulted from the construction of the separation wall. Israel must withdraw from the entire Occupied Palestinian Territory and the occupied Syrian Golan, and ensure that Palestinian refugees could return to their land.

48. It was a sensitive period for peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians, and Israel should take advantage of it. It would be tragic if the opportunity to resume the peace process was wasted. Indonesia supported Palestine's inalienable right to an independent State, based on the two-State solution.

49. **Mr. Mohamed** (Sudan) said that it was clear from the report of the Special Committee (A/66/370) that Israel was continuing to violate international law with its shameful blockade of the Gaza Strip, imposing severe suffering on the inhabitants: there was no freedom of movement, children were undernourished, and medical care and educational opportunities were restricted. The situation in the West Bank was no better, as Israel continued to confiscate Palestinians' land, demolish their homes, and deny them freedom of movement, health and education. In addition, Israel's continuing policy of building settlements and the separation wall was a flagrant violation of international law. Israel's ongoing colonialist behaviour had caused negotiations with the Palestinians to break down, thus adversely impacting the peace process.

50. Israel's continued occupation of the Syrian Golan Heights was also devoid of any basis in law, and its harsh treatment of the inhabitants represented further violations of international law and of human rights. The recent exchange of prisoners between Israel and Hamas was a welcome development, as was Palestine's membership of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

51. Peace in the Middle East required the establishment of an independent Palestinian State having Al-Quds Al-Sharif (Jerusalem) as its capital and the settlement of the refugee issue in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions. The international community should assume its responsibilities in the matter.

52. **Mr. Hamed** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that after four decades and more, Israel still had not withdrawn from the occupied Arab territories, disregarding a host of United Nations resolutions and the provisions of international law. It had been able to

enjoy impunity and place itself above the law owing to the protection of certain States which, while claiming to desire the rule of international law and to support human rights, were shielding Israel from accountability for its crimes. Indeed, two States in particular were currently punishing UNESCO for having accepted Palestine as a member, in the face of an international consensus that Palestine had every right to membership not only of UNESCO but of the United Nations.

53. It was clear from the Special Committee's report that there was a systematic, continuing pattern of human rights violations by Israel. In addition, it was pursuing its feverish settlement-building activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and its policy of terrorism and repression against Syrian citizens living in the occupied Golan Heights. Those citizens faced discrimination and denial of employment because of their refusal to accept Israeli citizenship and to serve in the Israeli army.

54. Furthermore, the Israeli authorities were seeking to cut the Golan off from its geographical and cultural ties with its Syrian motherland by building a separation wall east of the village of Majdal Shams in violation of international law, including in particular Security Council resolution 497 (1981). A formal complaint about the matter had been submitted to the Secretary-General, but unfortunately no action had been taken. Syrian citizens were also being arbitrarily detained by the Israeli occupation authorities and held under inhumane conditions that did not meet even minimal United Nations standards.

55. It was high time for the United Nations, and, in particular, the Security Council, to assume its responsibilities under the Charter and compel Israel to withdraw from the occupied Arab territories. The Organization's credibility, even its every existence, was at stake.

56. **Mr. AlSaloum** (Kuwait) said that the Special Committee's report provided a clear and candid account of the continuation by Israel of practices that contravened international humanitarian law and the principles embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Those practices had caused a sharp deterioration in the human rights situation in the occupied Arab territories and had increased the suffering of Palestinians and others.

57. Kuwait supported the request of Palestine for full membership in the United Nations, as a step towards realizing the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. In that regard, Palestine had achieved a historic victory by gaining admission to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

58. Kuwait called on the international community, particularly the Security Council, to find a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, the gravest threat to security and peace in the Middle East. Israel's continued settlement construction on Palestinian territory was an obstacle to peace. Israel had persistently shown intransigence, obstruction and contempt for international law in its efforts to strengthen the occupation and change the social and demographic situation on the ground. Most recently, its Government had decided to build 2,000 new settlement units in occupied East Jerusalem in a flagrant challenge to the international community. Palestinians were subjected to growing restrictions and violations perpetrated both by armed settlers and by the occupation forces. The international community should put an end to Israel's criminal practices by upholding international law and protecting defenceless Palestinian civilians.

59. Kuwait reiterated its full and steadfast support for the struggle of the Palestinian people to regain their legitimate rights, including the right to establish a State on their territory with Jerusalem as its capital. It welcomed the recent release of a number of detainees and called for the remaining prisoners to be freed. An international fact-finding mission should be sent to verify conditions in Israeli occupation prisons and assess compliance with the principles of international law. The continuing illegal and inhumane blockade of Gaza was yet another example of Israel's violations of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. Israel should withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan and from the remaining occupied Lebanese territory, and return to the borders of 4 June 1967; its continued occupation of any Arab territory was an obstacle to peace and security in the region. The international community should bring pressure to bear on Israel to end its gross violations of international law and to make a commitment to the peaceful resolution of the conflict in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003) through initiatives conducive to a just and permanent peace in the Middle East.

60. **Mr. Shaanika** (Namibia) said that Israeli practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territory,

including East Jerusalem, and in the other occupied Arab territories breached the Charter of the United Nations and eroded the inhabitants' fundamental rights. It was important to speak out, as long as Israel's practices presented a mortal danger to the well-being of the people of Palestine.

61. The expansion and new construction of illegal settlements and the erection of walls of annexation were an impediment to peace; the Israeli Government's continuing settlement activities defied international law, and the settlements in and around East Jerusalem were nothing but an attempt to alter the city's legal status and physical, demographic and cultural character. Such provocation must stop. As Israel was in grave breach of the principle of the inadmissibility of acquiring territory by force, the international community should compel it to end its occupation of the Palestinian Territory and its blockade of Gaza, which was a gross collective punishment of its inhabitants.

62. The only way to guarantee Israel's security, to which it was duly entitled, was through the creation of an independent Palestinian State alongside Israel, within internationally recognized borders, in fulfilment of a right far too long denied the people of Palestine. He hoped that Palestine's admission to UNESCO had sent a clear message to the Security Council as it considered Palestine's application for admission as a full Member of the United Nations.

63. **Mr. Al-Yafei** (United Arab Emirates) said that the report of the Special Committee (A/66/370) highlighted the grave and systematic human rights violations perpetrated in occupied Palestine and the occupied Syrian Golan by the Israeli authorities, which had continued to seize land, demolish Palestinian homes and expand settlements. The separation wall took up 10 per cent of the territory of the West Bank and isolated 12 per cent of Palestinians from the rest of the West Bank. Agricultural land, water resources and installations were being expropriated, particularly in Area C of the West Bank and the Jordan valley, in order to annex those areas de facto and promote Israeli investment and tourism. The growing presence of settlers in the West Bank had stoked tension and instability, but their daily acts of provocation were being ignored by the Government of Israel, which had systematically subjected Palestinians and the inhabitants of the occupied Syrian Golan to excessive force and arbitrary arrest.

64. The blockade imposed on Gaza since 2006 continued to restrict the entry of international aid, on which 70 per cent of Gazans depended, and of building supplies, which were sorely needed in order to rebuild the hundreds of homes, schools and health centres destroyed by Israel. The economy had been severely damaged, and poverty, chronic disease and physical and mental disorders were rife.

65. His Government fully supported the conclusions and recommendations contained in the report and deplored Israel's failure to cooperate with the Special Committee. It strongly condemned Israel's practices in the occupied Arab territories, particularly the recent decisions to intensify settlement construction in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and to freeze tax payments intended for the Palestinian Authority. Such unlawful measures had further undermined the quest for a peaceful solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

66. He appealed to the international community to intervene as a matter of urgency to oblige Israel to cease all such inhumane activities and war crimes and called on Israel to comply with the resolutions of the United Nations, the Charter, and other relevant international instruments.

67. The Palestinian people had a right to establish an independent State within the borders of 4 June 1967 with East Jerusalem as its capital, and the international community had a responsibility to protect the Palestinian people and the population of the Syrian Arab Golan from aggression and occupation. He hoped that the General Assembly would strengthen the mandate of the Special Committee, and that the fact-finding machinery would be strengthened.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.